



CALECSE

California Early Childhood
Special Education Network



**Funded by the California Department of Education (CDE),
Special Education Division**

**Leading with Trust: Strengthening Family Partnerships in
Early Childhood Special Education Through Alternative Dispute Prevention
Session 1: Building the Foundation
December 15, 2025**

About the California Early Childhood Special Education (CalECSE) Network

Funded by the CDE

<https://www.calecse.org>



CalECSE is a technical assistance project funded under the CCDE that supports Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAs), County Offices of Educations (COEs), and other Agency Partners in the areas of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C to B Transitions, Preschool Assessment Practices, and Preschool Child Find by providing technical assistance, professional learning, and demonstration of tangible practices that have been proven successful.

CalECSE leverages collaboration amongst agencies, disseminates resources, highlights existing exemplar practices, and provides direct technical assistance to improve the capacity, knowledge, collaboration, and implementation of evidence-based practices across agencies throughout California.

The CalECSE Network is committed to improving outcomes for children and their families by eliminating and addressing barriers to successful transition for California's youngest children with disabilities.

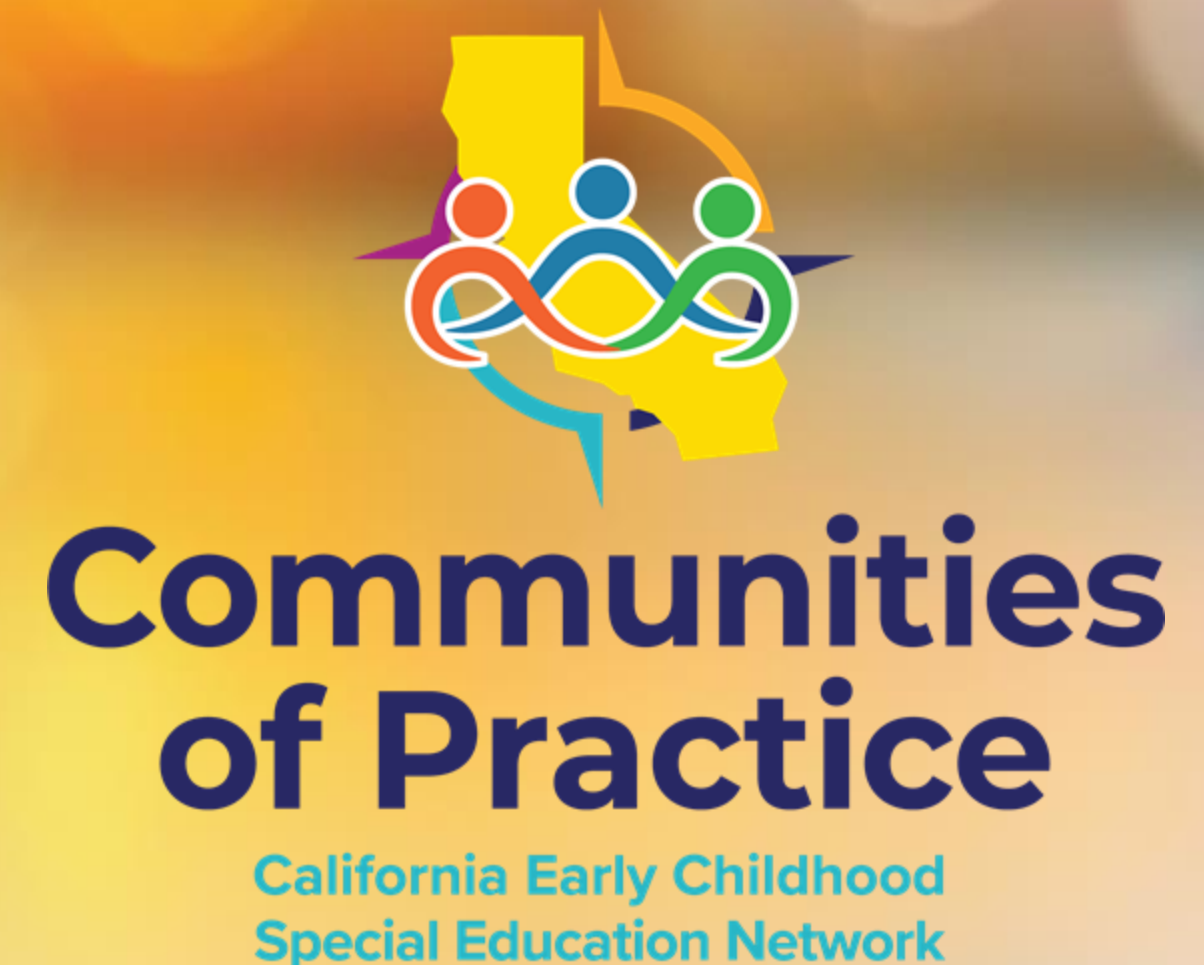
The CalECSE Network Leadership Team



Co-Executive Director, Dr. Scott Turner, East San Gabriel Valley SELPA
Co-Executive Director, Melanie Hertig, Irvine USD
Program Specialist (Exemplars), Carrie Rodrigues
Program Specialist (Northern Calif), Sara Castille
Program Specialist (Southern Calif), Laura Clarke

**Interested in joining a local
Community of Practice (CoP) for
practitioners who support children ages zero
to five ?**

Find our full schedule of
regional CoPs at:
[https://www.calecse.org/news-
resources/communities-
of-practice](https://www.calecse.org/news-resources/communities-of-practice)





Pathways to Partnership

Connect • Collaborate • Support

Leading with Trust: Strengthening Family Partnerships in Early Childhood Special Education Through Alternative Dispute Prevention

Session One: Building the Foundation

Project funded by:



ccee
California Collaborative
for Educational Excellence

Meet Your Presenters



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<https://pathways2partnership.org>

Objectives

- Gain enhanced insight on the continuum of dispute prevention and resolution within California
- Be able to identify how to access support and direct technical assistance from Pathways to Partnership (P2P) and how to build your own capacity
- Gain insight on P2P's Regional Implementation Lead network
- Be able to identify the component skills of effective listening and know where to locate valuable resources for building these skills



Pathways To Partnership

The Pathways to Partnership (P2P) consortium envisions a statewide educational community with the necessary skill sets to prevent, reduce, and resolve conflicts building trust and **mutual understanding** between families and educational agencies.

Our vision embraces **resolving conflict at the lowest level, preserving relationships** with all members of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, and ensuring the IEP process is the foundation for positive, equitable student outcomes for all students with disabilities.

Our vision seeks to **transform the way in which educators respond to conflict and dispute** within the California special education system and Statewide System of Support (SSOS) by establishing a sustainable continuum for dispute prevention and resolution that is accessible to all.



Regional Implementation Leads

- 01** Del Norte, Humbolt, Mendocino, Lake, Sonoma
- 02** Siskiyou, Modoc, Trinity, Shasta, Lassen, Tehama, Plumas, Butte, Glenn
- 03** Colusa, Yuba, Sutter, Yolo, Sacramento, Sierra, Nevada, Placer, El Dorado, Alpine
- 04** Napa, Solano, Marin, Contra Costa, San Francisco, Alameda, San Mateo, Santa Cruz,
- 05** Santa Clara, San Benito, Monterey
- 06** Amador, Calaveras, Tuolumne, San Joaquin, Stanislaus
- 07** Mariposa, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare
- 08** San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Kern, Ventura
- 09** San Diego, Imperial, Orange
- 10** Mono, Inyo, San Bernardino, Riverside
- 11** Los Angeles

- 1. Sonoma County SELPA**
- 2. Butte County SELPA**
- 3. Yolo County SELPA**
- 4. Solano County SELPA**
- 5. El Dorado County Charter SELPA**
- 6. San Joaquin County SELPA**
- 7. Merced County SELPA**
- 8. San Luis Obispo County SELPA**
- 9. Orange Unified School District SELPA and El Dorado County Charter SELPA**
- 10. Riverside County SELPA and East Valley SELPA**
- 11. Antelope Valley SELPA, Whittier Area Cooperative SELPA, Southwest SELPA, and Santa Clarita Valley SELPA**



COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Statewide Community of Practice

- Meets quarterly
- 100+ participants
 - Program Specialists, Directors, Coordinators
 - Independent Child Advocates
 - Seeds of Partnership Coordinator



Regional Community of Practice

- Meets regularly
- Each region in California has a Regional Implementation Lead who coordinates the regional CoP
- CoPs consist of both Educators and Family Empowerment Centers, Parent Groups, and Independent Child Advocates
- P2P provides support and consultation in developing Communities of Practice



Statewide Professional Development

**265 Trainers
trained**

- Facilitated IEP Training
 - 11 regions have received at least one Facilitated IEP training. We're now focusing on providing make-up sessions for areas that missed the initial training and building capacity through coaching and mentoring, so trained staff feel confident delivering the material moving forward.
- Trauma-Informed Mediation
- Mediating the Litigated Case—Straus Institute

Specific training requests and local needs can be made by sending an email to:

info@pathways2partnership.org



<https://pathways2partnership.org>

Statewide Technical Assistance

Pathways to Partnership

- Provides consultation support for system design, program development, and capacity building.
- Provides consultation on local and regional cases to prevent and resolve disputes.
- Provides technical assistance related to confidential disputes within the Statewide System of Support (SSOS).
- Provides professional development offerings that are tailored for a tiered model.

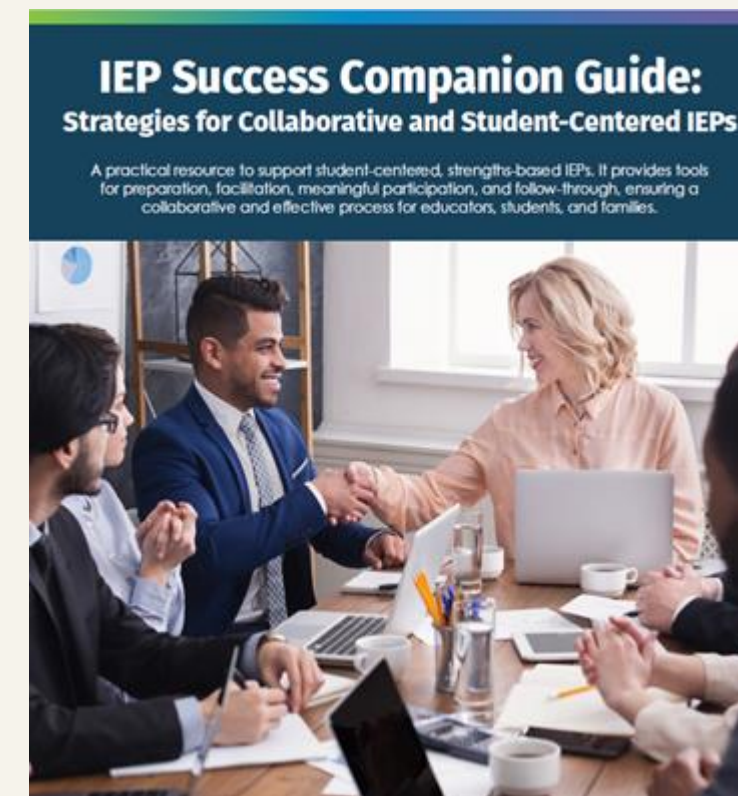


Statewide System Of Support Collaboration

In partnership with other Statewide Systems of Support—including High Quality IEPs, Open Access, and Multilingual Students with Exceptional Needs—we have collaborated to curate and co-develop targeted resources. Below are two examples of the tools created through this collective effort.

The IEP Success Companion Guide can be accessed on the Pathways 2 Partnerships website:

https://pathways2partnership.org/public/uploads/files/files/Resources/posts/IEP%20Success%20Companion%20Guide%20Book_03-11-25FINAL.pdf



<https://pathways2partnership.org>

Why is this concept included in an IEP Success Companion Guidebook?

Just as we teach self-awareness as a crucial competency to our students, we must begin by developing it ourselves. By surfacing and examining our own beliefs through heightened self-awareness, we can better understand our actions and their impact on others.

Research shows that this introspective practice leads to improved:

- Identity
- Self-knowledge about purpose, values, and roles in the community
- Emotional intelligence (i.e., the ability to recognize emotions and their connection to behaviors)
- Growth mindset
- Strong and fair relationships

Becoming self-aware about our beliefs helps shape our ways of being and ultimately drives our behaviors towards our students, parents, educators, and—most importantly—ourselves.

Let's explore!

We invite you to walk through the following activities to strengthen your sense of self-awareness and deepen your understanding of how you present yourself as an educator and how you perceive others. This understanding is essential for meeting the human needs of our students, staff, and families, ultimately fostering a sense of connection and belonging.



Practical Tools & Templates

- A Place to Begin
- Preparing for the IEP
- During the IEP
- After the IEP


Promoting Meaningful Participation

“**Listening** is not the **act** of hearing the words spoken, it is the **art** of understanding the meaning behind those words...The art of listening is creating the environment in which the other person **feels** heard.”
—Simon Sinek

PROMOTING MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION 38

Before the IEP Meeting: Preparing to Listen



Before entering an IEP meeting, it is crucial to keep ourselves centered. William Ury, in his video [The Power of Listening](#), emphasizes the importance of taking a moment of silence before any significant conversation. This pause allows us to tune into our own thoughts and feelings, letting go of what we're holding onto internally so we can make space for others. By grounding ourselves in the present, we increase our capacity to listen with genuine empathy and openness.



[CLICK TO WATCH](#)

During the IEP Meeting: Promoting Listening and Connection:

1. **Set the tone by acknowledging the shared purpose of the meeting:** supporting the student's growth and success. Acknowledge that this process can bring up strong emotions and encourage everyone to approach the discussion with curiosity and respect.
2. **Be fully present** by focusing on the speaker without interrupting or formulating responses in your mind. Use non-verbal cues such as nodding or maintaining eye contact to show you are engaged.
3. **Validate emotions** as they surface, whether from parent(s), students, or educators. Take a moment to acknowledge these emotions with phrases like, "I can see how much you care about this," or "It sounds like this is really important to you." Such acknowledgments validate their feelings and build trust.
4. **Ask clarifying questions** instead of making assumptions. Deepen your understanding through open-ended questions like, "Can you share more about what's been challenging?" or "What would success look like to you?"
5. **Reflect and summarize** key points to ensure everyone feels heard and aligned. For instance, ask "What I'm hearing is that you'd like more strategies to support your child's focus in class. Is that correct?"
6. **Create space for student voices** by actively including them if they are present. Ask for and honor their input, emphasizing their role as the central figure in the IEP process.

  IEP Success Companion Guide March/2025

 **ACTIVE LISTENING**

Active listening is a communication technique that involves fully concentrating, understanding, responding, and remembering what the other person is saying. It goes beyond simply hearing the words and requires the listener to engage with the speaker through verbal and non-verbal cues. This practice fosters better understanding, empathy, and trust in conversations, making it essential for effective communication.

RESTATE Mirror back to the speaker what they said. e.g., "You felt heard when that was said."	PARAPHRASE Restate in your own words key points to show understanding. e.g., "So you're saying that moment really made you feel valued?"
OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS Questions requiring an expanded answer beyond yes or no to deepen understanding. e.g., "Can you share a little more with the rest of the team about your concern with less time in the general education setting?"	CLARIFY Check in with the speaker to ensure correct understanding of what is being said. e.g., "So what I'm hearing you say is...is that correct?" or "Could you clarify what you just said. I want to ensure the rest of the team understands."
BRACKET Put some form of mental brackets, like parenthesis, around any thoughts that might get in the way of fully and completely listening. e.g., "Think to yourself, 'I don't like the way this team member is behaving right now, but I am going to set that aside so I can listen carefully for their underlying message.'"	ACKNOWLEDGE & VALIDATE Demonstration of empathy by a statement that communicates you are listening and trying to see things from another their perspective. e.g., "I'm hearing your concern and I can see from your perspective why you feel..."
PERCEPTION CHECK Paraphrase what the individual has said while checking in with their perceived thoughts and emotions e.g., "I hear how frustrated you are because of the lack of communication."	NON-VERBAL LANGUAGE Demonstrate open posture, make eye contact and visually track, smile, nod, etc.

Project Funded by    info@pathways2partnership.org
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[PATHWAYS2PARTNERSHIP.ORG](https://pathways2partnership.org) 

The Active Listening handout can be found on our website linked here:

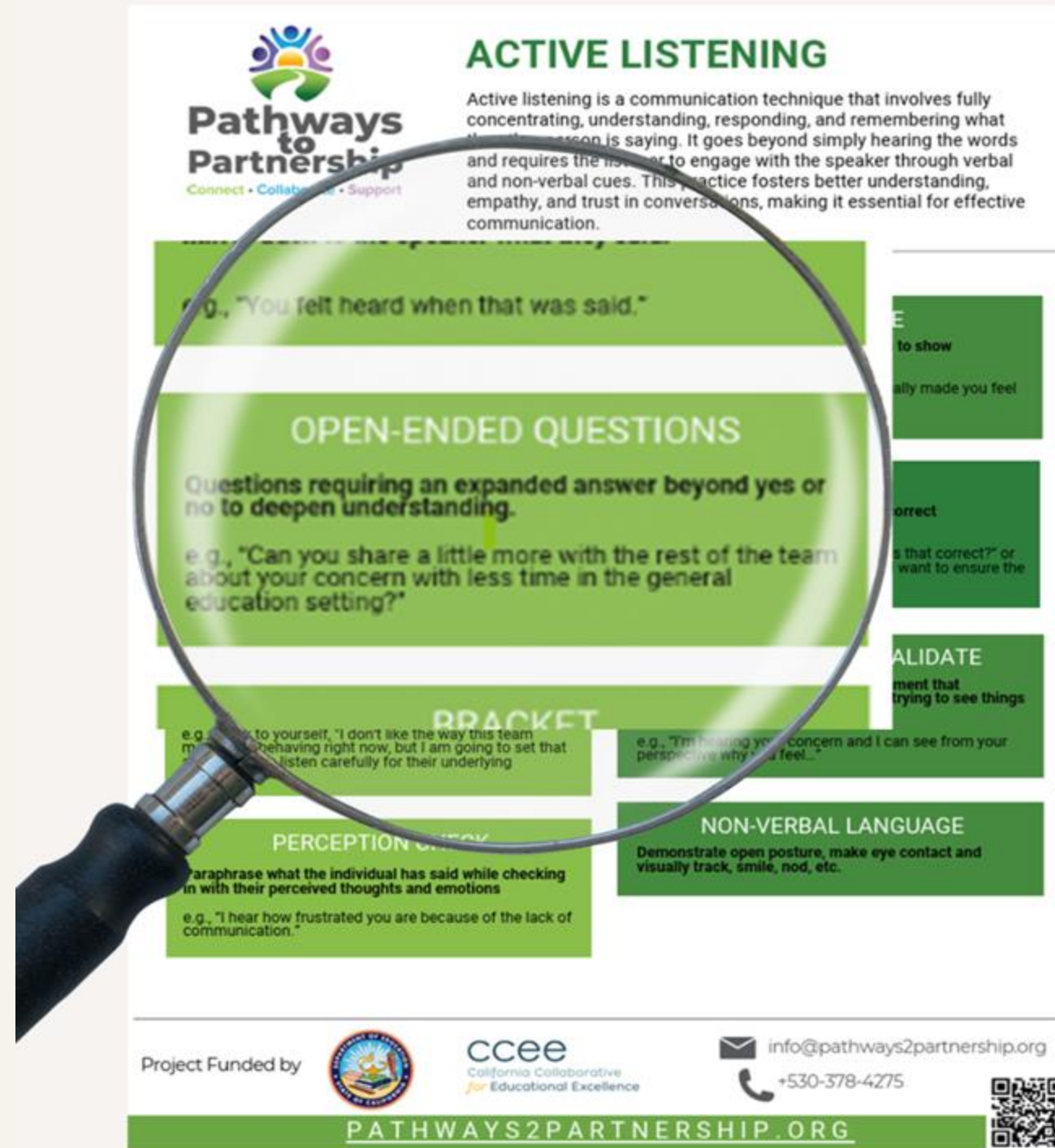
<https://pathways2partnership.org/public/uploads/files/files/Resources/posts/Active%20Listening.pdf>

The Promoting Meaningful Participation handout can be found on page 36 of the IEP Success Companion Guide linked here:
https://pathways2partnership.org/public/uploads/files/files/Resources/posts/IEP%20Success%20Companion%20Guide%20Book_03-11-25FINAL.pdf



<https://pathways2partnership.org>

Supporting Active Listening



Open-Ended Questions are effective communication tools as they:

- Help gather necessary information to increase shared understanding
- Assist in communicating empathy, a desire to understand the experience of another person

Sentence starters:

"Can you tell me more about..."

"Can you help me understand..."





Part Two: March 5, 2026

Join us for part two of this presentation, where we will take a deeper dive into more of the skills and strategies that build trust with families on March 5, 2026 from noon to 1 p.m.

Registration can be accessed here: <https://c-vusd-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/hQ1Tgy08ThaBwJhIJvRc9g#/registration>

<https://pathways2partnership.org>



CHECK OUT P2P'S WEBSITE



Resolving conflict.
Preserving relationships.

About Us



Pathways to Partnership aspires to build collective capacity, expertise, and resources in the prevention and resolution of conflict with a student-centered focus.



Training & Resources



We are building a continuum of support for dispute prevention and resolution within the State of California, forging pathways to enhanced partnerships.



Events



Check out our many professional development/capacity building opportunities. Offerings are tailored for a tiered model. Please contact us with us any questions.



<https://pathways2partnership.org>

Thank you!



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info@pathways2partnership.org



<https://www.instagram.com/pathways2partnership/>



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<https://pathways2partnership.org>

Pathways to Partnership, Special Education Resource Lead in Alternative Dispute Prevention and Resolution needs your feedback!

Please take a moment to complete this survey at your earliest convenience. Data from this survey will help our team provide beneficial resources across the state. Thank you so much for your time, we really value and appreciate your input.



Survey can be accessed here:

<https://tehamacountyselpa.jotform.com/240515077676865>

Pathways to Partnership (P2P) is part of the California System of Support and led by Tehama County Department of Education, Tehama County SELPA, Ventura County Office of Education and Ventura County SELPA. The project is funded by the California Department of Education (CDE) and the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE).



<https://pathways2partnership.org>

Share Your Feedback for a Chance to Win CalECSE 2026 Symposium Registration

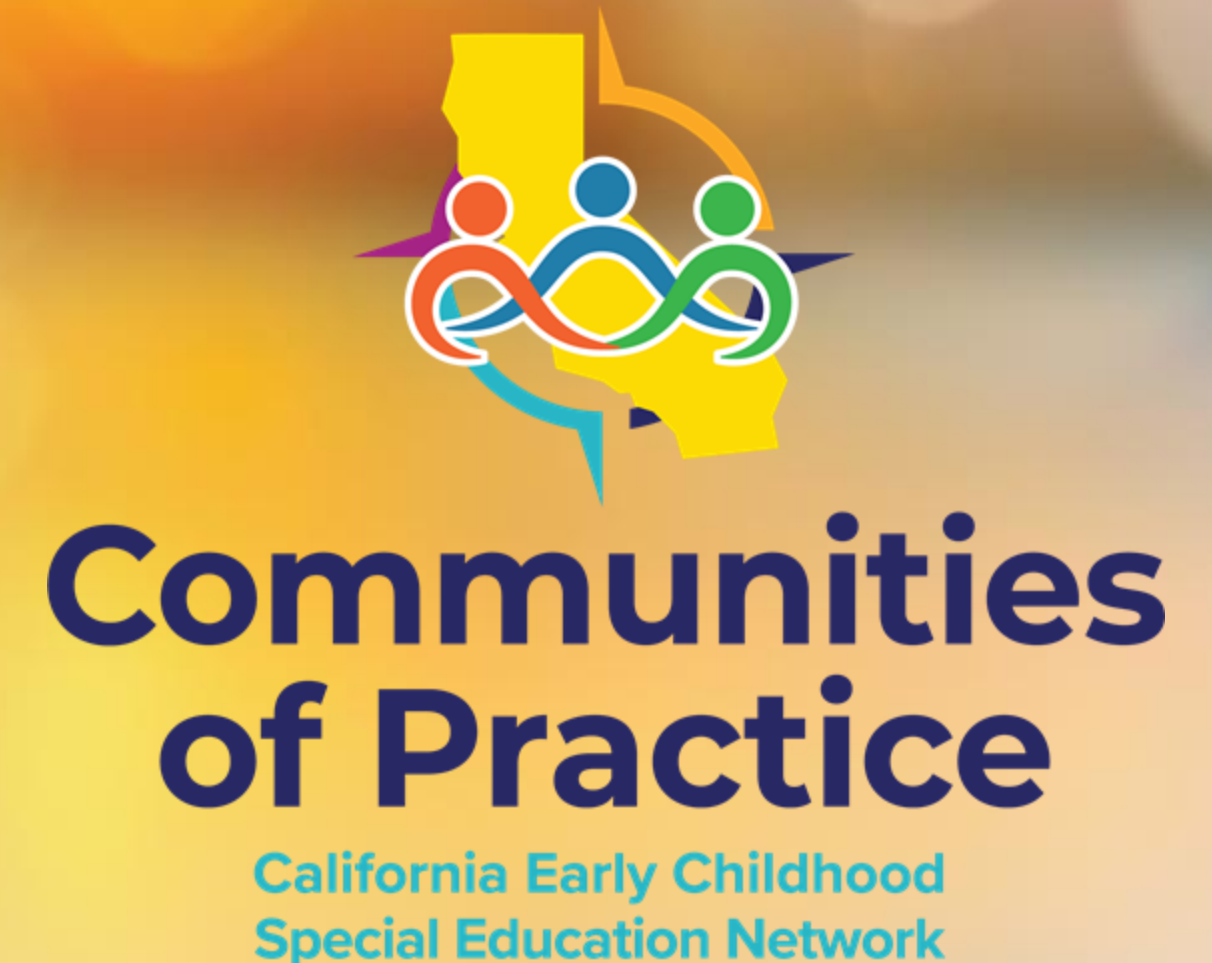


Please help us improve our practice and complete the zoom survey following this session.

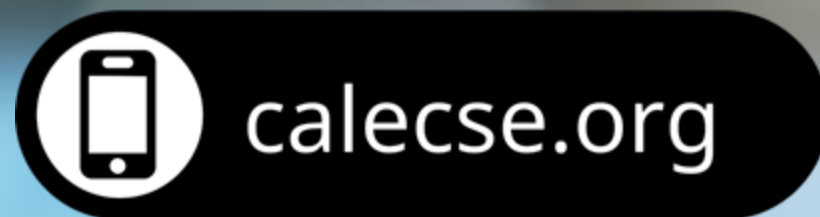
After doing so, you will be entered into a raffle to win a free registration to **CalECSE's 4th Annual Symposium** to be held in Northern California October 20–21, 2026. Valued at over \$500.

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Find our full line-up of no-cost trainings at:

<https://www.calecse.org/news-resources/intentional-practices-meaningful-impact>